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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 002513

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STATE FOR AF/W, DRL, INR

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [NI](#) [PGOV](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT OBASANJO ADMITS KNOWING ANAMBRA GOVERNOR
STOLE THE ELECTIONS; PDP SPIRALS INTO CRISIS

REF: LAGOS 2418 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne per 1.4 b and d

1. (SBU) Summary: Major Nigerian newspapers published an extraordinary exchange of letters between President Obasanjo and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) national chairman Audu Ogbeh. In his letter, Ogbeh claimed Nigeria was in a parlous state, specifically citing Obasanjo's inaction in resolving the political crisis in Anambra. In his rather unpresidential and brusque reply, Obasanjo admits to having learned that Ngige was the benefactor of a rigged election, yet turned a blind eye to this transgression. Publication of the letters has sent the ruling PDP into a paroxysm of recrimination, with members of competing factions calling for the resignations of their internecine rivals. Opposition parties are clamoring for Ngige's resignation or new elections. Ngige has denied admitting he lost the election. End Summary.

Startling Letters on Anambra Crisis

2. (U) The December 13 "This Day" newspaper carried an exchange of letters on the Anambra crisis between President Obasanjo and PDP national chairman Ogbeh. Ogbeh's letter, dated December 6, urged the president to resolve the crisis within the state and to arrest the arsonists who destroyed numerous government buildings November 10-11 (reftels). Obasanjo responded with a 14-page screed, defending his actions in Anambra and counter-accusing Ogbeh of failing in his duties as chairman to address the root of the crisis -- what Obasanjo termed the "intraparty" dispute between Governor Ngige and his nemesis Chris Uba (reftels).

3. (C) Obasanjo continued in his letter that during a 2003 meeting, Uba told Ngige, "You know you did not win the election, and Ngige answered "Yes, I know I did not win." The president writes he was "horrified" at hearing this and immediately asked both men to leave his residence. However, since Ngige had been constitutionally declared the winner, Obasanjo said he decided to live with the "moral dilemma" by only having pro forma interaction with Ngige until the governor's term expired; Ngige did the "honorable thing" and resigned; and/or Ngige was thrown out of office legally. (Note: The All People's Progressive Alliance, APGA, is contesting Ngige's election in court. APGA's Peter Obi is widely believed to have won Anambra. End Note.) Obasanjo claims the substance of this revelation about the fraudulent election was reported to Ogbeh who also failed to redress the issue. (Comment: While trying to put the onus on Ogbeh as party chairman, Obasanjo is hoisted by his own petard. What action could Ogbeh take to remove Ngige when Obasanjo, the nation's chief magistrate, remained passive, notwithstanding the criminal admissions he had heard? End Comment.)

Letter Fall-Out -- Calls for Resignations

4. (U) Prominent, pro-Obasanjo members of the PDP, are calling on Ogbeh to resign. However, PDP governors (who are mostly aligned with VP Atiku) are siding largely with Ogbeh. (Note: Increasingly, Ogbeh has been drifting toward Atiku's camp and away from Obasanjo. End Note.) The PDP national secretariat is meeting but has yet to issue an official

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statement. All major opposition parties--the Alliance for Democracy (AD), APGA, and the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP)--are bleating for Ngige's resignation. AD Director of Publicity, Dayo Adeyeye went further than most other parties, saying that Obasanjo's revelation proves the PDP rigged elections across the country. (Note: The Yoruba-dominated AD lost control of most of the southwest to the PDP in 2003. End Note.)

Ngige Denies Admitting He Stole the Election

5. (C) Ngige has publicly denied the president's allegation.

Ngige's press officer Chukks Akunna told Polchief that the governor "never said such a thing to the president." Akunna added that in his view the President's distaste for Ngige is "personal" and that Obasanjo seemed determined to see him ousted from office. Yet in a conversation with the Consul General, the mercurial Ngige was much more coy, stating he would not allow himself to be drawn into this verbal fracas. He preferred to remain silent, letting "people believe what they wanted to believe." In a meeting last month with Polchief, Ngige all but admitted not having won the election. He said Uba "helped" him considerably. (reftels). Akunna warned that the President may be in for more than he bargained since the 2003 presidential and gubernatorial elections were held in Anambra on the same day, on the same ballot. If those ballots are false, then so too are the returns giving Obasanjo the victory in Anambra, Akunna asserted.

Comment

16. (C) Ogbeh's letter to Obasanjo was critical but professional. In some passages, it was even statesmanlike, within a Nigerian political lexicon that tends towards hyperbolic rhetoric. Even in this milieu, Obasanjo's response is jarring. The president's revelation that he heard Ngige admit to stealing the election, yet did nothing about it suggests he has lost his political compass. In his desire to shift blame to Ogbeh, Obasanjo seems not to have considered that the public would hold him personally accountable for this gross failure to uphold the standards of democracy. Conversely, Obasanjo may have taken a calculated risk. By exposing his passivity, he also revealed Ngige's active criminality. Obasanjo might have figured he could weather the resultant storm, but Ngige might not. Moreover, should the nettlesome PDP chairman be swept in the tide, or at least made more reticent, so much the better. Thus far, the public mostly appears to view Ogbeh as a "patriot", who sought to give the President sage, if difficult, counsel. However, Ogbeh's fate is in the hands of the party, not the public, and his future is unclear.

17. (C) Comment Cont'd. Ngige is squarely on the hot seat right now and is squirming to find solace and support. Neither will come in abundance. However, Ngige is resilient and will try to stay in place as long as possible. How the electoral tribunal hearing the Anambra case handles this latest information will be telling. This could well determine Ngige's destiny. End Comment.

18. (U) This cable has been cleared by Embassy Abuja.
BROWNE